



AASRA NEWSLETTER

Affiliated with NRTA, a division of AARP
February, 2024

LEGISLATIVE AWARENESS DAY 2024

March 8, 2024 9 am to 12 noon on Zoom

SAVE THE DATE! On Friday, March 8th, AASRA will once again co-sponsor our annual Legislative Awareness Day with Delta Kappa Gamma Arizona. This event will be on Zoom and the registration information will be sent to all AASRA and DKG members approximately 10 days before the event. Be sure to check your email inbox regularly and RSVP when you receive the invitation.



Coalition's ongoing work to protect the ASRS and preserve our defined benefit pension system.

A special "Thank You" to **April Coleman, DKG Legislative Awareness Chair**, for her help with organizing this event; and to **Alice Reule, AASRA and DKG Parliamentarian** for hosting the event on Zoom.

We look forward to seeing you
on **March 8th!**

In the past, we focused on securing state legislators and other elected officials. This year we are exploring a slightly different direction with our guest speakers.

◆ Two state legislators will speak about the critical teacher shortage and current proposals to increase educators' salaries.

◆ **Jennifer Marson, Executive Director, AZ Association of Counties**, will discuss current election issues in Arizona that may affect the November election

◆ **Steve Ramos, AEA-RETIRED ASRS Coordinator**, will present an overview and update on the Arizona State Retirement System (ASRS).

◆ **John Moody, AASRA Legislative Consultant** will bring us an overview of the current legislative session, including critical issues facing legislators, current happenings at the Capitol, and his insights based on 30 years as a lobbyist in Arizona.

◆ **Daniella Yaloz Smith, ARSC Coordinator** and lobbyist with over 20 years' experience, will share information about the Arizona Retirement Security

AASRA AT THE CAPITOL *Who We Are ~ What We Do ~ and Why*

AASRA has had volunteer lobbyists since 1999. We are required by statute to identify one **Designated Lobbyist (DL)** and one or more **Authorized Lobbyists (AL)**. The Designated Lobbyist is the point of contact for required quarterly and annual filings with the Secretary of State's office.

AASRA Designated Lobbyists have been, Ron Murphy (1999-2003), Bev Cuthbertson (2003-2004), Sigrid Whitman (2005-2016), Joe Carter (2016-present). Current ALs are Janet Fee, Mary Henderson, Kristi Koziol and Marshall Militano.

We represent your interests at the Capitol and in conversations with legislators and other elected officials. Since we are representing people other than ourselves, we are registered as lobbyists with the Secretary of State's office (see below). We base our lobbying efforts on two documents: 1) the AASRA Constitution, Article II, Section 1, which lists the purposes of the Association, and 2) the AASRA Legislative Priorities, which are reviewed and adopted by the Board of Directors each year, usually at their September meeting. The current list

of priorities may be found on the AASRA website at <https://www.aasra.org/index.php/about/legislative-priorities>.

Why do we do this? **Because we care** ... about our profession, our public education system, our defined benefit pension system and all of the long list of reasons why each of us chose a career in public service. We want to do whatever we can to ensure that our members and the educators who come after us will still have what we have had throughout our careers in education.

Arizona law defines lobbying as the following: **Attempting to influence the passage or defeat of any legislation by directly communicating with any legislator;** (*AZSOS Lobbyist Handbook, emphasis mine*)

Arizona law also defines the term “lobbyist: as follows:

Under A.R.S. § 41-1231(12), “lobbyist” means any person who is employed by, retained by, or representing a person other than themselves, with or without compensation, for the purpose of lobbying and who is listed as a lobbyist by the Principal in its registration pursuant to A.R.S. § 41-1232. (*emphasis mine*)

Joe Carter, AASRA Legislative Liaison

Our **AASRA Constitution and Bylaws** states our purposes and how we operate our organization. Article 2 of the AASRA Constitution lists the purposes of our organization.

Article II – Purposes

Sec. 1. The purposes of this Association shall be:

- A. To monitor and support the Arizona State Retirement System on pensions, particularly the Defined Benefit plans, health programs and long term disabilities programs.
- B. To promote passage of legislation beneficial to public school employees and retirees. To cooperate with other organized groups that support public education and public school employees.
- C. To promote continuing education, preparation for retirement, including awareness about Social Security and Medicare issues and sources of assistance for retirees in need in our role as an affiliate of NRTA: AARP's

Educator Community.

- D. To promote increased awareness of AASRA in order to increase membership, expand influence and present the image of aging with dignity, independence and purpose.
- E. To promote group and individual involvement of AASRA members by utilizing their expertise in community service to their fellow members, active colleagues and state and local community issues and affairs.

These purposes guide the organization in its advocacy, goal setting, and activities.

AASRA LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES 2023-2024

Adopted by the Board of Directors, September 20, 2023

1. Work to protect and strengthen the Arizona State Retirement System (ASRS); increase its funded status and improve current and future retiree benefits.
2. Oppose legislative or other efforts to weaken the ASRS or other public pension systems. Support the efforts of the Arizona Retirement Security Coalition (ARSC) and other organizations to protect our defined benefit pension plan.
3. Work to increase sustainable funding for public education, support efforts to improve the salaries of all public school employees and work for issues that will improve the integrity and image of public education, including K-12, community colleges and public universities.
4. Work to limit the expansion of Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (ESA's) and advocate for increased oversight of ESA's. Support legislation and/or ballot measures that reduce or eliminate allocation of public monies to private schools.
5. Support legislation and/or initiatives that increase the oversight and transparency of funding for charter schools, as well as their accountability to the public.

6. Promote restoration of funding and budget increases for human services such as caregiving funds, healthcare and social services for children, seniors and families.
7. Actively encourage and support legislation and funding sources that directly and comprehensively address school safety and security needs, including, but not limited to, the following programs and initiatives:
 - School Preparedness Plan, *Arizona Department of Education*
 - Framework for Safe and Successful Schools, *National Association of Elementary School Principals*
 - School Health & Safety, *National Education Association*
 - School Safety Resolution, *National Sheriff's Association*
 - Community Oriented Policing Services Grants, *U.S. Department of Justice*

HOW YOU CAN SPEAK IN COMMITTEE HEARINGS

Without really speaking...or even going to the Capitol!

REQUEST TO SPEAK (RTS) is a misleading term from the days before computers. If an individual wanted to record their concerns about a piece of legislation during the committee process, we had to go to the Capitol, fill out paper forms for bills we wished to speak about, submit them to a staff member, wait for the bill to be considered and our name to be called. Then we had to go to the microphone and tell the committee members (legislators) why we thought this bill was either good or bad for the state. We might be asked questions or be rebuffed by legislators who disagreed with us.

Then came the early computer stations at the Capitol. Instead of completing a paper form, we recorded our positions on a computer; several were located in the hallways and lobbies of the House and Senate. During busy days, these terminals usually had lines of people waiting to register to speak.

As technology advanced, the current RTS system became available. Now you can do your "speaking" from the comfort of your living room by using your

computer, tablet or smartphone...with one caveat. You **MUST** activate your RTS account **IN PERSON** at the Capitol or at a satellite office in Tucson. After it is activated, you can use the system from home or anywhere else WIFI is available.

But wait...there's more! *Civic Engagement Beyond Voting (CEBV)*, a grassroots group, has made it extremely easy to activate a RTS account. Visit their website at <https://www.cebv.us/>, click on the appropriate buttons and provide the required information. Their volunteers will go to the Capitol and activate your account for you. In 2-5 days, you will receive an email with information about your activated RTS account. There is much more information on the CEBV website, including online training in how to most effectively use the RTS system to make your voice heard at the Capitol.

I also recommend that you log onto the legislative website at <https://www.azleg.gov/>, click on the Request to Speak button on the homepage and explore the site. There is an especially helpful tool named **RTS Manual** that can be downloaded as a pdf and read as you have time.

HOW TO CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATORS And Why You Should

In a separate article I discussed the Request To Speak (RTS) system wherein Arizona voters can voice our opinions at the state Capitol. While the RTS system is an excellent tool to officially record your support or opposition to a particular bill, it does have some limitations.

- RTS is useful only during the committee hearing process each legislative session. Once that process has concluded, usually by the end of March, legislators typically do not refer to RTS comments.
- RTS comments are limited to 250 characters, including spaces and punctuation. This allows very little comment about the pros and cons of a bill or how it may affect you.

One of the best ways of contacting your legislators is by sending them a handwritten note. In the age of

computer-generated communications, an original, handwritten letter gets their attention because it is so rare. **Your letter should be in your own words**, not "boilerplate" text generated by someone



else, a bot or AI. **Be sure to include how the proposed legislation affects you personally.** Personal stories, spoken or in writing, can be a powerful message to legislators. Letters should be addressed as follows:

Senator (Representative) Smith
Arizona State Senate (House)
1700 W. Washington St.
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Be sure to identify yourself as one of the legislator's constituents, provide your home address and the best way(s) of contacting you. If you don't know who your legislators are, visit the Arizona legislative website at <https://www.azleg.gov/>. Hover on the **Members** button and click on **Who Is My Legislator**. Follow the directions to identify your legislative district and your elected legislators.

Other effective means of communicating with your legislators are **emails and phone calls/voice**



messages. Their email addresses and phone numbers are available on the legislative website (see link above). Click on **Members > Member Roster**, then scroll through the list of legislators to find your legislator(s).



Their legislative district, party affiliation, email link, office number and phone number are listed to the right of their name. To send an email, click on the email link and complete the required information.

Remember that ours is a representative form of government. Most legislators want to hear from their constituents and all recognize that responding to constituents is part of their responsibilities as a legislator. By communicating with them, you can influence their decisions that affect nearly every aspect of our lives.

The Legislative Awareness Day information and helpful ways to communicate with our legislators were prepared and written by Joe Carter, AASRA Legislative Liaison. AASRA is proud to have such a talented and informed person in our organization.

You are appreciated Joe!

We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."

— Elie Wiesel

President's Message



Hello fellow AASRA members,
We have begun a new year and a new legislative session. Yes, we need to pay attention to what our elected officials are doing. Yes, we need to pay attention to the possible candidates for office for the local, state and federal levels. Are you receiving the Legislative Alerts through the AASRA Mail Chimp? **Do we have your current email?** If you aren't receiving these emails, please let me know at aasra.az1956@gmail.com so we can keep you informed.

We are facing new challenges and adventures in our lives in 2024. Many of our units will be having elections for new unit officers. It is your chance/opportunity to take on a leadership position. Being treasurer, secretary, vice president or even president is very rewarding. Put your name in the hat or step up at your local unit meeting and say you will be an officer. Thank you for your commitment. You will enjoy your time serving your local unit.

It is time to ask that retired friend of yours who worked with you in the school district to join you for a unit meeting. You will enjoy the company of your friend and they will enjoy too. Make sure you offer them the opportunity to become a member. Presidents, do you have the current membership form? It is online at our website www.aasra.org. You can download the current membership form there.

Do you know a great community person to be a guest speaker for your unit's meetings? We all need to work together to make our units and state organization better to support ASRS and our defined benefits pension plus the many altruistic programs we support and state scholarships.

Save the Date of June 4th, 2024 - The date for our **AASRA Convention**. It will be at the same location as last year – **Church of the Beatitudes**, Nelson Hall, 555 W. Glendale Ave, Phoenix. 9 a.m. the doors will open for breakfast refreshments. Registration will only be \$40.00. And a great time will be had for all.

Mary Henderson, AASRA President

Things to Check On

Did you record your 2023 volunteer hours and monetary donations to your unit? If not, contact **Doug Honaker**, Community Participation chair, at **480-200-5960**, or wdhonaker@cox.net . Please turn in your information as soon as possible.

Did you or your unit send its minutes to AASRA Historian, **Sandy Marshall** or notify her of a member's death & send an obituary? If not, you can contact Sandy at azsandy123@cox.net .

Mark your calendar for the upcoming **AASRA Convention** on **Tuesday, June 4th**. It will be at the **Church of the Beatitudes – Nelson Hall 555 W. Glendale Ave., Phoenix, Arizona 85021**.

Watch for more information coming from the Convention Committee.

ASRS News

ASRS IS AN EARNED BENEFIT

ASRS achieved a one-year total fund rate of return of 8.2%. This was one of the top rates for funds for its size in the United States to achieve this return. The total funded status is up slightly.

The fund invests in five types of investments. They are public equity, private equity, interest rates, credit and real estate. This helps to keep the funds stable and growing.

There are approximately 653,000 members, which include retirees and current employees.

Janet Fee, ASRS Liaison for AASRA, attended the ASRS Board meeting for January 2024. The meetings are every other month on the final Wednesday of the month. If you want to see the agenda for the Board's meetings, go to azasrs.gov and click on Board of Trustees.

BE ADVISED: The ASRS will never call you to collect data from you over the phone unless you called ASRS first, and it is returning your call.

Learn more about ASRS at its website: www.azasrs.gov. *From Janet Fee's reports*

George Osborne - A generous basic state pension is the least a civilized society should offer those who have worked hard and saved through their whole lives.

National Advocacy



October 2 - October 4, 2023, Mary Henderson and Kristi Koziol attended the NRTA Advocacy Conference in Washington, DC. Panel discussions were held on Federal Legislative Climate, Federal and State Retirement Security, Public Pension & Advocacy, AARP Social Security Campaign and Caregiving Policy Solutions.

The Family Caregiving Act main points:

- 48 million family caregivers assist their part and others
- Family caregivers provide \$600 Billion in unpaid labor
- Caregivers lose \$304,000 in personal income to provide for them

After the conclusion of the conference was a brief visit to Senator Mark Kelly's office. First, Mary and Kristi met with his staffer to present advocacy for caregiving and "care givers" asking for Kelly's support. Then the two were delighted to be able to chat with Senator Kelly. They shared with him information about AASRA and what we are about. His interest was in our state pension and its transparency.

From Kristi Koziol & Mary Henderson AASRA reports

Around the State

Westside Unit programs reported by Barb Weber, Dist. 3B VP. December was a social time with sharing member traditions and delicious goodies. January – Ilene Haber from the Maricopa County Recorder's Office detailed the process of mail in voting and in person voting. She explained how voting is secure and how to check the status of your mail in ballot.

Pinal County Unit's first meeting on October 4 was chaired by President, Barb Sandust. The unit was most interested in helping classes from Casa Grande Elementary School District to have the opportunity to go on field trips. The December meeting was held at the beautifully decorated home of June Graber. The members continued their traditional book donation with 40 books to Against Abuse. Keith Seaman, State Representative, will be the speaker for the February meeting to discuss legislation and education.

Northwest Unit is a very active unit headed by Lori Good. In September Marshall Militano introduced Deer Valley teacher, Kelley Fisher, when she was awarded the Mary Ann Vath Award. Alice Reule and Barb Weber gave the history of this award and presented Kelley with the engraved glass Beacon of Light symbol. Mary Ann Vath was a founding member of the Northwest unit and was the AASRA President when she passed away. This award is a tribute for Mary Ann's service as a teacher, leader, and helping others.

Some meetings have included programs on Maricopa County Recorder's Office personnel who explained the need for volunteers during elections and ways of keeping cybersecurity that ensures the integrity of the elections. One very interesting program was presented by Claudia Kirscher of Liberty Wildlife. This organization rescues injured birds and animals injured or orphaned. Many are released back into the wild and the ones who can't be released stay at the facility with proper food and care. Check out its website: www.libertylife.org. In January, members were treated to a presentation by Royal Norman, Chief Meteorologist for Channel 3. He shared how he came to be a TV meteorologist and his thoughts on our changing weather in Arizona and our state's water condition.

East Valley Unit donates an ASU scholarship each year by raising funds through two raffles a year. Jeanie Ghan and Mary Ann Gallagher created and donated two baskets for the 2023 EVSRA Holiday Basket raffle. The two winners came from the Tempe District 3 were Sharon Bryant, Rover School principal and shown, Joann Hopper, a 6th grade social studies teacher. The next fundraiser is its \$100.00 Bookmark raffle. It begins in March and the drawing is May 1, 2024.



Kachina Unit (Sedona area) programs have quite varied programs. A life-changing organization, 100+ Women Who Care, is changing the Verde Valley for the better! A recycling nonprofit started by three women. It spends \$6,000 a year for items that aren't recyclable. They ended the year with a Christmas potluck and a fun white elephant exchange.

Pima County Unit activities were reported by AASRA Dist. 6 VP, Cindy Mort. Brendon Blake, a Senior Specialist for AARP, spoke to our group about long-term care, public transportation, caregiving, health care, and affordable housing. Within AARP, Brendon has supported an initiative entitled Work and Save. This program would establish a defined contribution pension plan to which employees and employers contribute.

Making Transitions Easier speaker, Rose Muzzy, considers herself to be a matchmaker of sorts. She specializes in matching elderly or special needs patients who can no longer live on their own with assisted-living homes that meet her client's needs.



Ben's Bells organization has been operating as a nonprofit since 2003, growing kindness education programs and continuing to distribute thousands of Bells every year. After the speaker, we had the opportunity to paint some of the coins used to construct the bells. We enjoyed having the chance to be able to give back to the community.

A fundraiser for our Scholarship Fund was a Gaslight Theatre's Production of **A Small Time Christmas** on November 12th @ 6:00pm. It was a sell-out with a total of 68 tickets sold! The profit from the event was \$759 plus a donation of \$114 for a total of \$873 added to our University of Arizona College of Education scholarship fund.

In January Kerri Sierra from the College of Education at the University of Arizona gave a very informative presentation that explained how our scholarship recipients are chosen.

Sahuaro Unit regularly meets at Rudy's BBQ in Goodyear. In December State Senator Eva Diaz (D-LD22) was the guest speaker. She presented her expectations for the upcoming legislative session and shared some of her experiences from the 2023 session.

Phoenix/Scottsdale Unit - Joe Carter, District 3A VP, was instrumental in arranging a meeting for this unit. A very nice luncheon was held on October 23 with 10 members and prospective members attending. AMBA helped fund the meal. Hopefully, AASRA & the unit can build on that.

Relax and Read Awhile

Pima County Unit has an active Book Club which meets monthly. Listed below are the books read by the club recently.

Killers of the Flower Moon by David Grann.
#1 New York Times bestseller! The story takes place in the 1920s. Osage Indian tribe living in Oklahoma are being killed one by one after the tribe becomes rich by discovering oil. The Osage deaths attract the attention of the FBI, which begins an investigation. (Maybe some of you only have seen the movie – now read the book!)

Two Old Women by Velma Wallis.
An award winning, bestselling novel about two elderly Native American women who must fend for themselves during a harsh Alaskan winter.

The Pig Did It by Joseph Caldwell.
First installment of a new trilogy parodying traditional Irish themes finds a notorious porcine instigator wreaking havoc in the lives of star-crossed lovers, perpetrators of family feuds, and melodramatic heroes throughout the wild Irish land and seascape.

Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger.
Story of Holden Caulfield, a teenage boy who has been expelled from his prep school and is wandering through New York City over a few days, struggling to come to terms with the complexities of growing up and the seeming phoniness of the adult world.

If you don't like to read, you haven't found the right book. - J.K. Rowling



The AASRA Newsletter is published three times a year. AASRA, 7250 North 16th Street Suite 302, Phoenix, AZ 85020-5279.,

President - Mary Henderson, President Elect - Barb Weber, Secretary - Joanna Haspels, Treasurer - Katie Elgar, Executive Director- Kristi Koziol, Newsletter Editor- AnnJi Craig-Wooten.

www.aasra.org

Facebook – All Arizona School Retirees Association

Benefits Available for Our Members



a proud partner with AASRA to provide you a variety of helpful benefits.

- ❖ Discounts on Travel, Dining & More
- ❖ Long Term Care
- ❖ Home Health Care
- ❖ Medical Air & Ground Emergency Assistance
- ❖ First Diagnosis Heart Attack & First Major Heart Surgery
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- ❖ Plans Cancer/Heart/Stroke
- ❖ Policy Final Expense
- ❖ Whole Life Insurance Policy Tax
- ❖ Deferred Annuity
- ❖ Accident Expense Insurance Policy
- ❖ American Hearing Benefits (AHB)
- ❖ Dental & Vision

For more details on benefits

Check on line: www.aasra.org

Or call

1-877-556-4582

Need an agent's help:

1-888-698-0972

M-F, 8 am - 6 pm CST



All Arizona School Retirees Association